Chapter 14
Advancing the Potential of Diversity for Innovation

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ABSTRACT

This chapter introduces a collaborative conflict resolution model with a focus on cultural diversity and innovation. Its practices are research based, presented with explanatory theories, and uniquely suited to the multicultural teams of the global market. The chapter presents the optimal criteria for multicultural process identified in evaluative research conducted in four parts of the world: the Balkans, Cameroon, Nepal and Ukraine. It aims to demonstrate the correlations between collaborative conflict process at its best and innovation within diverse teams and organizations.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the connections between contemporary conflict talents and optimal facilitation of multicultural groups. It begins with scholarly links between cultural diversity and ingenuity along with resultant challenges. The chapter then shows how conflict skills can create and sustain the cooperative conditions promoted by scholars for nurturing innovation. Research evaluating ideal multicultural process will be shared. The author hopes that understanding these specifics will encourage business to adopt best practices in their pursuit

of innovation. Ultimately, business will also recognize and embrace the rich assets of multicultural employees, teams and approaches. Daniel Goleman describes this as schooling in emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995). He believes that competitive advantage requires cooperative training in the social skills described here. Exemplary collaboration is necessary to fully leverage business, particularly intellectual, assets.

For readers unfamiliar with contemporary business scholarship, this article exemplifies the growing academic use of qualitative research for in-depth exploration of the real world complexities and nuances faced by business today. One popular example of qualitative methods is the business

case study. Laurence Lynn of the University of Chicago is one of many respected proponents acknowledging that, in the face of complex problems, like the relationship between diversity and innovation, there is no one right or best answer (Lynn, 1999). In response, business case analysis must necessarily draw upon the entire body of behavioral and social science and make use of it in myriad ways. "The reasoning process is more experiential and associative, involving pattern recognition and intuition, than it is logical…. or scientific reasoning (Lynn, 1999)." This does not mean that traditional quanitative statistical analysis is not also valued in business scholarship as demonstrated by this book's varied studies. In fact, ideally the qualitative research presented in this chapter will be used to inform and shape rich longitudinal studies designed to identify the variables that can be replicated in business to produce optimal innovation. Without preliminary qualitative exploration, like that presented in this chapter, however, academic research risks being overly simplistic (Lewicki, Barry & Saunders, 2007). "Several important qualitative…activities inform most, if not all, quanitative projects (Druckman, 2005)."

Thirty years ago the author started facilitating cross ethnic groups. This work evolved into mediating and advising cross-functional problem-solving, teambuilding, labor-management disputes and complex processes involving many perspectives. As one example, the author led cross ethnic dialogue with different professions from the Balkans during their war. She has worked with about seventy different countries and myriad cultures and business functions: engineering, science, service, and human resources—to name a few. Organizations have requested her assistance with escalating crisis involving actual and potential violence. At times, management-labor relationships are so broken that communication and information have essentially stopped. Without the qualitative evaluative research presented in this chapter, no research study could have even

begun to imagine the reasons and perceived reasons for such problems. Qualitative surveys and observations were necessary to begin exploring nuances that might have been missed or masked by premature attempts at quantification (Druckman, 2005).

Even if the qualitative data presented here is used to create more informed behavioral categories for future research, though, business cannot rely on traditional academic research alone. Because of the complex and dynamic problems contemporary global businesses constantly face, unfortunately more often than not without the benefit of relevant academic research, it must somehow learn to conduct its own applied research on an on-going basis (Bordens and Abbott, 1999). For example, in the field of negotiation, much research has studied Japanese and American behavior, leaving much of the rest of world cultures a negotiation mystery (Lewicki, Barry & Saunders, 2007). Applied research, aspiring to investigate real world problems as they arise, must somehow fill this enormous academic gap. Thus this chapter also aspires to guide and shape applied research and guide actual business success with designing structures that create pioneering innovation. The author's work mirrors the shifting realities of the contemporary workplace. More and more workers are being asked to work as part of cross functional teams that include various cultures. Their ability to effectively cooperate with each other in performing tasks is key to business success. In this chapter the author hopes to share the best of her experience and insight, along with research based knowledge, so that business can act proactively rather than reactively. The proactive path avoids the enormous costs inherent in conflict and loss from failure to maximize the potential of diverse teams. The author will share her proven practices for structuring groups in ways that effectively stimulate the synergy of difference. They generate creative passion while avoiding the many pitfalls that predictably arise. She will describe step by step capacity building in the exact structure that

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